

Sports

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Baseball: Union's perfect week highlighted by wins over RMA

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The Panthers capped off a perfect week with a 6-2 victory over Fannin County on Friday after taking down Riverside Military Academy on Tuesday and Thursday.

Knocking off the rival-Rebels is always sweet, but sweeping the season-series from Region 8-AA foe Riverside, drastically improves Union's postseason chances, especially when the frontrunners are jockeying for position down the stretch.

On Thursday, the Panthers traveled to Gainesville, where the Eagles were seeking revenge following a walk-off, 1-0 loss in Blairsville, two days prior.

With Riverside leading 1-0, Union (5-3, 3-1) scored three in the third and two in the fourth for a 5-1 advantage.

The Eagles made it a 5-4 game after five innings but the Panthers tacked on two more in the sixth and two in the seventh for a 9-6 victory.

The win gave Union the season-sweep of Riverside - providing the Panthers with an important tiebreaker, should it come into play at the conclusion of the regular season.

Union's 1-0 win over the Eagles came at home on Tuesday, when senior Joseph Mancuso fired a complete game, three-hit, shutout with 9 Ks.

He also delivered the game-winning base hit in the bottom of the seventh to cap off a 2-for-3 game with an RBI, and a walk.

Riverside's Trevor Ballard did enough to get his team the win, but his offense didn't come through. The ace of their staff worked 6 1/3 innings, allowing 1 run, 6 hits, while fanning seven.

The only knock on Ballard's performance was his control. He struggled to find the strikezone at times, finishing with 4 walks and hit 3 batters.

The three batters he plunked didn't come back to haunt him but his fourth and final walk of the day would.

After leaving 8 men on base through the first six innings, Union finally broke through in its final at bat.

Sophomore Patrick Baggett drew a one-out walk despite falling behind 0-2 early in the count.

A Lance Rich pop fly to shallow right field dropped in - putting two aboard and the winning run in scoring position.

With Mancuso coming to the plate and Ballard's pitch count at 121, RMA pulled their starter and went to Russ McAfee.

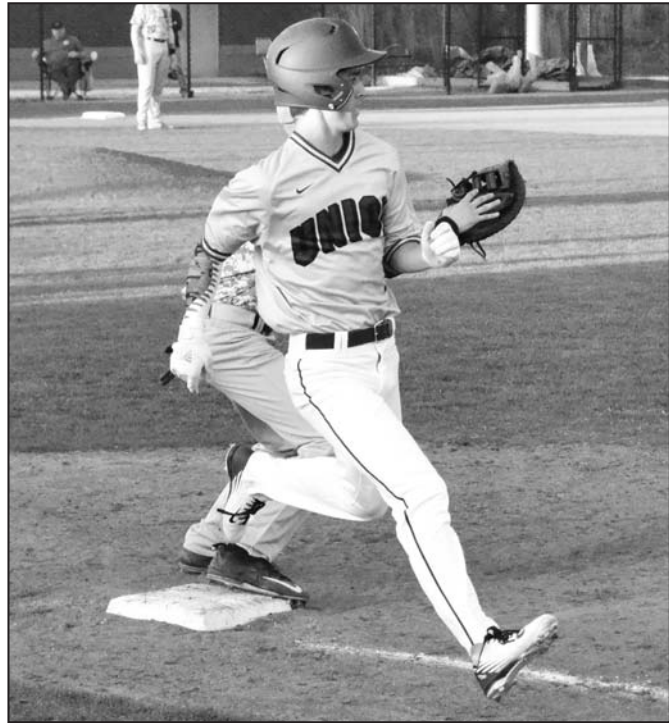
Two straight balls to begin the at bat gave Mancuso the perfect hitter's count and the third pitch was laced into left field - easily scoring Baggett.

Earlier, Union wasted an excellent opportunity in the third inning with runners on first and second and one out, but a Panther baserunner was cut-down at the plate on a base hit to right field by Baggett.

In the fourth, Union



Joseph Mancuso rips the game winning single into left field to defeat Riverside 1-0. Photo/Todd Forrest



Patrick Baggett races down the line and beats out a throw in Union's win over Riverside. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Panthers celebrate their strike-off win over Riverside last week. The win was the first of a three-game winning streak. Photo/Todd Forrest

loaded the bases with a single by Mancuso, sophomore RJ Banton was hit by a pitch on an 0-2 count, and with two outs, senior Will King was hit by a pitch with a 1-2 count. Ballard was able to record a strikeout for the third out and escape the inning with the game remaining scoreless.

Mancuso sat the Eagles down 1-2-3 for the second straight inning and in Union's half of the fifth, Baggett singled and Mancuso walked but both were left stranded.

A leadoff single and a stolen base put Riverside in scoring position but Mancuso got a pop-up to second baseman Logan Dyer. Then a grounder to Dyer advanced the runner to third, resulting in the second out.

For the third out, Mancuso pulled the string with a 2-2 breaking ball to keep the visitors off the board.

Sophomore Candler Colwell drew a 7-pitch walk with one out and immediately swiped second base. Unfortunately, as he slid around the tag, his hand came off the base and the Eagles' second baseman applied

the tag for the second out.

King was hit by a pitch for the second time but was left at first base.

Mancuso made quick work of Riverside in the seventh - throwing nine strikes, no balls, and striking out two.

On Thursday, the Eagles played host to the Panthers and Rich got the nod from Head Coach Robby Roxbury and the senior went 5 innings, scattering 6 hits, allowing 4 runs, 2 earned, while recording his first win of the year.

At the plate, Rich, Brown, and junior Dawson Groves were too much for the Eagles pitching staff.

Rich singled three times - driving in a pair, Brown singled twice with 2 RBIs, and Groves went deep for his first homerun of the season.

A sacrifice fly gave RMA a 1-0 lead after one inning of play

The Panthers did all of their third inning damage with two outs and when the dust settled, Union was on top 3-1 and would never trail again.

Dyer drew a base on balls

with one out and advanced into scoring position on a passed ball, allowing Rich to tie the game on a base hit to center.

Mancuso and Banton drew walks to load the bases and Brown went to the opposite field to drive in two more.

Freshman Coleston Daniel walked with one out in the fourth and Dyer reached on a bunt single.

Baggett singled to left to score Daniel and make it a 4-1 game. A balk moved Dyer to third and he later scored on an error by the catcher - making it a 5-1 game.

A leadoff double resulted in the Eagles getting one run back in the bottom of the fourth. Then a pair of singles and a two-out double trimmed the Union lead to 5-4 after five innings.

The Panthers wreaked more two-out-havoc on RMA in the sixth after Dyer walked and Baggett advanced him to second - setting the table for Rich, once again.

Another line drive back up the middle scored Dyer. Mancuso followed with a walk and Banton made them pay with

a two-out double to stretch the lead to 7-4.

Davis took the mound in the sixth and fanned the leadoff man but walked the next two, forcing Coach Roxbury to turn to King.

The senior maneuvered his way out of trouble with a fly out and a strikeout.

Groves led off the seventh by sending a 2-1 pitch deep over the left field fence.

Candler Colwell reached on an error, stole a base, and scored on a sacrifice fly by Daniel.

With a 9-4 advantage, King walked the leadoff man, then an error put two aboard. A double cut the Union lead to 9-6, but King mowed down the next three hitters, like "Wild Thing" Ricky Vaughan.

The Panthers finished the week 3-0 thanks to a 6-2 win over Fannin County on Friday.

Union's "pitcher-by-committee" paid off as four pitchers combined to limit the powerful Rebels lineup to just 2 runs and 3 hits.

Candler Colwell got the start and recorded the win in 2 innings of work. Banton entered in the third and worked 2 1/3 innings, King went 2/3 inning, Davis pitched a scoreless sixth and Mancuso yielded a run before slamming the door in the seventh.

Banton and Groves drove

in two runs each and the Union lineup benefited from 9 walks and one hit batter issued by Rebels' pitching.

It was the fourth inning before the Panthers got on the board, but they went on to put up 6 runs in the final 4 innings.

Groves drew a leadoff walk in the fourth and Crawford Colwell entered as his courtesy runner and reached third after forcing an errant throw by the catcher. Candler Colwell brought him in with an infield single.

Dyer and Baggett followed with singles and Candler Colwell scored on a passed ball for a 2-0 Union lead.

Mancuso walked and Banton singled to score Dyer and Baggett to stretch the lead to 4-0 after four.

A sacrifice fly got one run back for the Rebels in the fifth but the Panthers tacked on two insurance runs in the sixth.

Mancuso singled and Daniel replaced him as a courtesy runner. King walked, Brown advanced the runners with a ground out, then Groves brought in Daniel and King with a base hit to center.

A hit batter by Mancuso in the seventh resulted in a run courtesy of an infield single, but Mancuso recorded a strikeout to end the game.

Panthers 1, Riverside Military Academy 0 - Stats:
HITTING - Baggett 2-for-3 with 1 run, 1 BB, and 1 SB. Rich 2-for-4. Mancuso 2-for-3 with 1 RBI, and 1 BB. Banton 1-for-2, 1 HBP. Andrew Brown 0-for-2 with 1 SAC. Candler Colwell 0-for-2 with 1 BB. King 1-for-1 with 2 HBP. Cole Davis 1-for-2 with 1 BB, and 1 SB.

PITCHING - Mancuso 7 innings, 0 runs, 9 K, 3 hits, and 1 BB. WINNING PITCHER - Mancuso (2)

Panthers 9, Riverside Military Academy 6 - Stats:
HITTING - Baggett 1-for-3 with 1 RBI. Rich 3-for-4 with 2 RBIs, 1 run, Mancuso 0-for-1 with 3 BB, and 1 run. Banton 1-for-3 with 1 RBI, 1 2B, and 1 BB. Brown 2-for-4 with 2 RBIs. Groves 1-for-4 with a HR, 1 RBI, 1 run. Candler Colwell 0-for-4 with 1 run, 1 SB. Daniel 0-for-2 with 1 RBI, 1 run, 1 BB. Dyer 1-for-2 with 3 runs, 2 BB.

PITCHING - Rich 5 innings, 4 runs, 2 earned runs, 4 K, 6 hits, 1 BB. Davis 1/3 inning, 0 runs, 1 K, 0 hits, 2 BB. King 1 2/3 innings, 2 runs, 1 earned run, 4 K, 1 hit, 1 BB.

WINNING PITCHER - Rich.

Panthers 6, Fannin County 2 - Stats:

HITTING - Baggett 0-for-2 with 1 BB, 1 run. Mancuso 1-for-1 with 2 BB, 2 SB, 1 HBP. Banton 1-for-1 with 2 RBIs, 2 BB. King 1 run, 1 BB. Groves 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs, 1 BB. Crawford Colwell 0-for-1 with 1 run. Candler Colwell 1-for-3 with 1 RBI, 1 run, 1 BB. Dyer 1-for-1 with 1 run, 1 BB.

PITCHING - Candler Colwell 2 innings, 0 runs, 1 K, 0 hits, 1 BB. Banton 2.1 innings, 1 unearned run, 2 Ks, 1 hit, 1 BB, 2 HBP. King 2/3 inning, 0 runs, 1 K, 0 hits, 0 BB. Davis 1 inning, 0 runs, 1 K, 0 hits, 0 BB. Mancuso 1 inning, 1 earned run, 1 K, 1 hit, 0 BB, 1 HBP

WINNING PITCHER - Candler Colwell

Late goal puts Union away in thriller vs RMA

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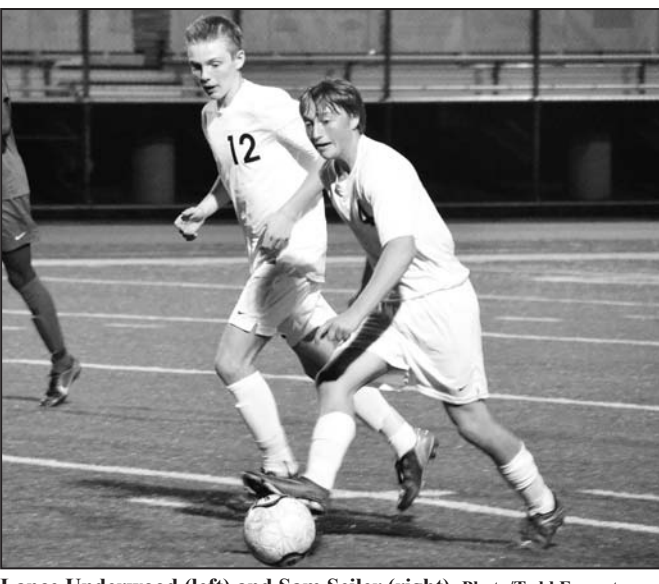
With the intensity of a playoff game, Union County and Riverside Military Academy battled for 80 minutes, but in the end, it was an RMA goal with 9:18 left in the game that extended their advantage to 3-1, and the Panthers were unable to recover.

With the Region 8-AA Co-Champions sharing the field, the contest felt as if Region title implications were riding on the outcome, despite the fact that it was only the first region contest of the year.

After the teams were feeling each other out over the first 20-plus minutes, the Eagles rattled off a pair of goals during a 9-minute stretch, late in the first half.

Union County senior goalkeeper Justin Eigel showed why he's one of the best in the business, and kept his team in the game, despite the onslaught from Riverside. Unfortunately, the offense was unable to gain any serious momentum and the Panthers were on the defensive for the majority of the game.

In the game's 26th min-



Lance Underwood (left) and Sam Seiler (right). Photo/Todd Forrest

ute, a defensive breakdown put Eigel in a 1-on-1 situation, resulting in an Eagles goal.

The Panthers' goalie made a pair of diving saves over the next 6 minutes to keep it a 1-0 game, but in the 33rd minute, a perfectly-placed kick from 20 yards out, over the outstretched hands of Eigel - made it a 2-0 game.

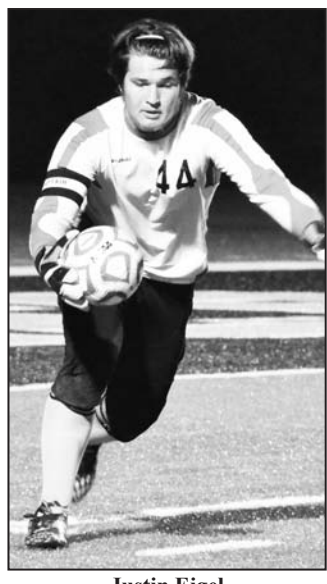
The second half opened with Union County on the attack, and for the first 25 minutes, the Panthers were the aggress-

sors.

It wasn't until a free kick in the 61st minute that Union got on the board, when Sam Seiler was able to push the loose ball past the Eagles' keeper.

Trailing 2-1, it was a brand new game, and Eigel continued making save after save - keeping it a one-score game.

The Panthers received another free kick in the 63rd minute, but were unable to capitalize.



Justin Eigel

In the 70th minute, Eigel prevailed in a 1-on-1 situation but a minute later, he was put into another 1-on-1 and this time, RMA made it a 3-1 game.

Monday's game at Towns was postponed due to storms but Union will be at Fannin County on Tuesday at 5 and 7 p.m.

Another giant 8-AA contest is on tap for Friday when Social Circle visits Blairsville.

The games will get underway at 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Region 8-AA Baseball Standings

TEAM	REGION REC	OVERALL REC
1. SOCIAL CIRCLE	1-0	5-3
T2. UNION COUNTY	3-1	5-3
T2. WASH WILKES	4-2	4-9
4. RABUN COUNTY	1-1	2-7
5. OGLETHORPE COUNTY	1-2	3-6
6. RIVERSIDE MILITARY	1-3	3-4
7. GREENE COUNTY	0-2	0-2

THIS WEEK'S REGION GAMES:

Tuesday: Oglethorpe Co. @ Greene Co.
Tuesday: Washington Wilkes @ Social Circle
Tuesday: Rabun Co. @ Riverside Military
Friday: Rabun Co. @ Greene Co. (DH)
Friday: Riverside Military @ Social Circle (DH)
Saturday: Union Co. @ Oglethorpe Co. (DH)